



MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS
WOUNDS OF WAR

"Dozens of fathers and mothers bring their children to the Al-Fadhl Clinic in Basra, Iraq, Baghdad, in order to get a wheelchair for their children from the 'Wheelchairs for Iraq Kids' NGO. The children are victims of car bombs, IEDs, IEDs, IEDs, IEDs or falls. Homemade devices such as plastic chairs attached to a couple of wheels are replaced by comfortable wheelchairs made by the prisoners in the Rapid City State Prison in South Dakota, where they are manufactured without labour costs and are transported to Iraq free of charge"
Shot details: Canon EOS 30 Mark II with 35-35mm lens at 35mm and F/5.6, 1/8000sec, ISO 400

MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS

BEING ON THE ROCKS (RIGHT)

"Three months ago these young women travelled with their uncle to the trash dump of Shawwa um Jidir. They used to live in south-west Baghdad, but because of shortage of water for the sheep they chose this nomadic life"

Shot details: Canon EOS 30 with 100mm lens at 100mm and f2.5, 1/800sec, ISO 400

MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS

OPEN HOUSE (FAR RIGHT)

"The military were enquiring about a fourteen year old girl who disappeared. Everybody denies knowing about the kidnap despite there being mentions of it at the mosque that day. Even when the Americans offer money in exchange for information, no one volunteers information for fear of provoking a retaliatory attack from the militia. This man is a police officer and has to show his papers"

Shot details: Canon EOS 30 Mark II with 35-35mm lens at 18mm and f2.8, 1/2500sec, ISO 400



“My hardest challenge was to get beyond the point of fear and start photographing”

Marielle Van Uiter

Grieving widows, bloodied torture cells and paralysed bomb victims may not be everyone's choice of subject, but photojournalist Marielle Van Uiter explains to Natalie Johnson why her project is so important

It took just seven days for the US army to accept Marielle Van Uiter's request to visit the troops in Iraq. The Dutch photojournalist's mission was simple: to report life as she saw it in Baghdad, but what she found were thousands of potential stories to explore. With such little time in the city, the freelancer narrowed her portrayal into seven clearly-defined cutting-edge portfolios: War Widows, 82nd Airborne, Wounds of War, Operation Baghdad, Saddam's Palace, Saddam's Torture Rooms and Trash Dump.

"The press officers liked my ideas and body of work and invited me along. I had to pay for the flight and a Kevlar helmet and body armour, but I didn't hesitate even for a second." Previous to the tour in Iraq, Marielle had accrued only two years of experience, but has made her mark reporting in several Middle Eastern war zones, including Afghanistan and the West Bank. When probed as to why this line of photography appeals to her, her answer comes without hesitation: "I think that during war people are more aware of their lives and of their families. The difference between good and wrong is much more visible, which creates interesting images. I believe everybody has a bright and a dark side and depending on the circumstances, they let one of those win."

"The reason I wanted to go to Iraq was to show why the forces are still there," the 35-year-old photographer continues. "Even

though the American soldiers are there, there is still a lot of violence. Poverty and pain are visible everywhere, as war leaves a track of horror which is reflected in my pictures." Marielle realises her work could be deemed as controversial, as photographing residents could lead to retaliation from terrorist groups Al Qaida and Jayesh Al Mahdi, who still operate in and around the city. "I think when the American army draws back it could become very dangerous for the widows I talked to, for example, because they are seen as an 'enemy of the state'." "War Widows" was the first in the seven portfolios she composed, and she claims it was the most challenging of the set. "Mothers told me stories of how their children and husbands had been kidnapped and killed by Al Qaida and Jayesh Al Mahdi. It was hard to take these pictures of 'broken mothers, because they were very emotional and it was impossible not to be affected by that." Flicking through the images, Marielle sighs heavily as she stops at an image of a woman gripping a photo of three girls. "This woman's daughter, Nowar, was collaborating with the American 82nd Airborne," Marielle

MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS OPERATION BAGHDAD

"Since the invasion in Iraq in 2003, the focus is shifting from Operation Iraqi Freedom into Operation Enduring Freedom. Patrols pass through the inner city as well as the countryside of Baghdad, where total anarchy is reigning and the notorious 'Spartan' Jaysh al Mahdi and the Ba'athist Al Qaeda seem more visible every day."

Shot details: Canon EOS 1D Mark II with 16-35mm lens at 17mm and 14.5, 1/5400sec, ISO 250

GETTING TO KNOW...

Marielle Van Uiter

Website: www.mariellevanuiter.nl

Age: 35

Nationality: Dutch

Country of residence: The Netherlands

Kit: Canon EOS 1D Mark II and Canon 5D, 16-35mm f/2.8 lens and EF 100mm lens (with teleconverter)



Preferred genre: Documentary (mainly war and society)

First job: Journalist for a Dutch newspaper published in South Africa, Zambia and Botswana.

Current job: Photojournalist

Biggest achievement to date: Undercover photographic feature in Afghanistan

Best piece of advice for trainee photojournalists: Work very hard and never think the best shot has already been made. Be creative and try to find different angles to tell a story.

Career highlights: Right now is very exciting, because I am doing radio and television interviews because of my exhibition on Afghanistan.

Career lows: I was taking photographs in a clinic in Jalalabad, Afghanistan when the Taliban started to try to blow it up. I escaped but later I found out that a Japanese man who worked for an NGO was kidnapped and killed. That was very hard to deal with and I was very good to catch his plane back to Kabul. These are the moments when you realise how vulnerable you are.





MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS
MEMORIES OF WAR

"Sergeant Richard from the 82nd Airborne (shown) told me how he tattooed himself with a crawling depicting the birth of his child, which was growing in his wife's belly. The crouched man symbolizes himself, wounded and helpless, during a patrol, with his wife protecting him."
Shot details: Canon EOS 5D with EF 100mm lens at 100mm and f/2.1/30sec, ISO 400

MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE BLACK HAWK

"When the Americans invaded Iraq and shut down Saddam Hussein's offensive policies they discovered a number of them will not survive past 2010 because the architects used the salty brackish of the Liberty River, which are subject to corrosion. The Americans now fish in these rivers for amusement rather than food as the river is badly polluted and the fish are inedible!"
Shot details: Canon EOS 1D Mark III with 24-35mm lens at 15mm and f/2.8, 1/200sec, ISO 200

"I tried not to think about the dangers and focused on the story I wanted to tell"

✦✦ recalls. "They swapped information for protection. One day the daughter discovered that the old potato factory, which was being used by the Americans as a base, would be the target of a rocket attack. She passed this information directly to the American coalition forces so they could escape. A few days later, the terrorist group Sijet Jaysh Al Mahdi hijacked the school bus Nowar was on and kidnapped her and her sister, Saad. The girls were held for two days by the terrorists who systematically raped them. On the third day the mutilated bodies of the daughters were dumped naked outside their home." It's harrowing stories like these that Marielle was so desperate to share.

The photojournalist's second photo story portrays life from the barracks, documenting the accounts of the 82nd Airborne. In this collection of portrait photographs, the photojournalist focused on the soldier's tattoos as physical representations of their stories. "The purpose of this portfolio was to give the American army a face. I wanted to portray the soldiers as human beings who have also faced personal loss out there. Many of them choose to remember their fallen friends and time in Iraq by having tattoos drawn on their bodies, as to never forget them," Marielle says sympathetically. "Some soldiers described their heroic deeds, others shared memories of their fallen comrades and some were just too shocked or too ashamed to go into details."

Marielle says the reality of where she was truly hit home when she too came under fire. "One day we were walking through a very dangerous part of Baghdad when gunfire started. My body armor was almost falling apart and I did not want to jeopardize my safety, but I realized that there was a story to be told. I tried not to think about the dangers and focused on the story I wanted

to tell, but the atmosphere was quite tense and it was hard to capture a single picture. My hardest challenge was to get beyond the point of fear and start photographing."

Marielle met many of the targets of the violence as she pieced together shots for her "Wounds of war" document, which features the victims of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and suicide bombs, many of who were children. "I met many paralyzed children who were waiting in a long line for a wheelchair. American NGO 'Wheelchairs for Iraqi Kids' is providing these chairs and just goes to show how much is changing here, and that is something worth documenting." Looking through the images, Marielle recalls one of the stories she heard: "One woman told me how she had been standing next to a suicide bomber when he pushed the button. She ran away but dropped her daughter, so I jumped on top of her to protect her. Her daughter's backbone broke and now she is paralyzed for the rest of her life." The depressed mood of the crowd lifted as the chairs were dispersed to the throng of citizens that had gathered. "When you are in a war zone it feels good to spend at least one afternoon with people who are happy and want to be photographed. Both the children and the adults were overjoyed when they got a wheelchair, and this shows in these pictures."

"Operation Baghdad depicts the outcome of the counter-insurgency," the 35-year-old informs. "On the one hand the forces help the population with things like wheelchairs, but on the other hand the nationals are still weary of this so-called 'enemy'. It is a very schizophrenic war." Despite this, Marielle's photos actually show the positive interaction between the American soldiers and the local population, dispelling the common myth. ✦✦



**MARIELE ON HER PHOTOS
LIVING ON TRASH**

"At the trash dump of Shawa'im Jala, Fata, mother of six children, takes care of another seven children. Her nephew was killed by a car bomb seven months ago in Qubay'a."

Shot details: Canon EOS 5D with 300mm lens at 100mm and f/5.6, 1/250sec, ISO 400



MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS LEFT AT THE GATE

"This woman told me of the tragic events which tore her family apart," reveals Marielle. "As retaliation for helping the American troops, Jayesh Al Mahdi kidnapped, raped and murdered two of her daughters. They were so cruelly mutilated that her husband didn't recognise his own daughters at first sight."

Shot details: Canon EOS 1D Mark II with 35-35mm lens at 18mm and f/2.8, 1/200sec and ISO 400

created by the media. "I met many nationals when I was out on patrols with the troops, and they were more than happy to be photographed. Some even invited the soldiers and myself in for tea and food."

For her fifth portfolio, Marielle photographed American soldiers taking up residence in the former palaces of Saddam Hussein. "Hussein had 99 palaces in total, and they are the last visible examples of his power, but today they are used as bases for the troops. When I was sitting in the black hawk helicopter and saw the vast areas surrounding these glittering palaces I was astonished, but when I got inside I found that most of the gold was just paint and the chandeliers were made of plastic." This afforded Marielle the opportunity to explore the lighter side of repositage as well as aerial and architectural photography, whereas her penultimate project, 'Saddam's torture rooms', showed the sinister facet of the tyrant's reign. "Hearing the stories of kidnap and abuse from the widows and mothers of Baghdad give these darker tales a voice," she comments.

The final project, entitled 'Trash dump', depicts life for the refugees living among rubbish. "The people living on these dumps were chased off their land by Hussein and now are constantly having to escape the attacks of Al Qaeda and Jayesh Al Mahdi. The result is that the children live on and eat the trash and do not dare go to school because they know the terrorists could attack at any second." Photojournalists are often criticised for generating a story rather than reporting the truth, but Marielle is quick to defend her position. "It depends on the circumstances and the way you want to shoot. Normally I just shoot what I see, but as a photojournalist you cannot neglect the fact that your presence changes the situation. For example when I was in the West Bank in the Billin demonstration, the Palestinians were pelting and throwing stones because they knew that was what the media wanted to report. So to make the story of a mother who



MARIELLE ON HER PHOTOS LAST WORDS

"Opponents of Saddam's regime were kidnapped, held in these dark cells and repeatedly tortured – the majority never saw daylight again. In 2011 these quarters, currently occupied by the US army, will be handed back to the Iraq people where it is expected to become a memorial site."

Shot details: Canon EOS 1D Mark II with 35-35mm lens at 35mm and f/2.8, 1/300sec, ISO 320

lost a child or husband more real, I asked them to hold up a photo to reinforce the impact of this personal drama. But you have to be honest and be yourself. Listen sharply to what they have to say, because in one story there can be hidden stories which are worth being told."

Since returning from Iraq, Marielle's images have featured in a static array of publications across the globe. To see more of this evocative portfolio visit Marielle's website at www.marieleluisversum.nl, where information about her forthcoming projects and exhibitions are also listed.